

Historiography and the *Sho'ubiya* Movement*

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which Iranian mytho-history was woven into the narratives of Islamic history. It argues that the inclusion of narratives such as the ones that equate several of the earliest Iranian mytho-historical kings to the earliest Koranic prophets or claim that Persian was the language of the prophets from Ādam to Esmā'il, reflects the concerns of the *Sho'ubiya* movement. The paper also analyzes the ways in which these Iranian kings are represented in the *Avesta* as paradigmatic rulers and how their essential function as good rulers is retained in the later *mythos* and, hence, texts so that they are equatable to the prophets. The paper argues that these narratives reflect not only a concern for equality among Iranians as Muslims, but also the ways in which intellectuals negotiated the interstitial spaces between culture and politics.

Keywords

Social history, Kings, Prophets, Avesta, Tabari, Perso-Islamic History

The last two decades have seen the rise of interest in the poetics of pre-Islamic odes and of wine, love, mystical, and court poetry. In more recent years, some of this attention has shifted to the poetics of formative ninth and tenth century histories and specifically those narratives that deal with critical or highly controversial moments in the history of Islam. One of the least studied controversies in this context is the ninth-tenth century *Sho'ubiya* movement¹ which was concerned with the equality of non-Arab Muslims and Arab Muslims along religious, socio-cultural, genealogical, and linguistic lines. The movement has been formally characterized as a literary one (Mottahedeh, 161-3) and, therefore, has been precluded from most discussions regarding

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cultural politics and the social history of Iran after the Islamic conquest.¹ Another reason for this preclusion is the popular association of the movement with those poems that vaunt a poet's heritage and the lampoons and invectives which debunk the Persians' and Arabs' respective claims to cultural or genealogical superiority.² This paper contends that several seminal and popular ninth and tenth century universal histories reflect the concerns of the *Sho'ubiyas* insofar as they treat at length genealogical, territorial, and linguistic issues in a bid for establishing the equality of the Muslim Iranians and Arabs. The texts that we shall analyze, namely, the anonymous *Tarjoma-ye tafsir-e Tabari*,³ Bal'ami's (d. 992 or 7 CE) *Tarjoma-ye tārikh-e Tabari*⁴ (also known as *Tārikhnāma*, and henceforth referred to as such), and Tabari's (838-923 C.E.) *Tā'rikh al-rosol wa'l-muluk*⁵ (henceforth, *Tā'rikh*),⁶ all include reports which

¹ Most surveys on the early history of Islam spend a few paragraphs or a short chapter on the movement. Likewise, a JSTOR and Index Islamicus search reveals a handful of articles on the *Sho'ubiyah* movement, most of which were published during or before the 1970s. Two stand out among these: the first is Lutz Richter-Bernburg's article entitled "Linguistic *Shu'ūbiya* and Early Neo-Persian Prose" which was published in 1974 and the second is Roy Mottahedeh's seminal article, "The *Shu'ūbiyah* Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," which was published in 1976. The latter directly addresses the position of scholars who "having found that the *shu'ūbiyah* controversy says so little about the questions that scholars have traditionally associated with it, have chosen to demote and dismiss it as an issue peripheral to the great intellectual and social struggles of the early Islamic world" (162). See also Goldziher, 137-197 and Gibb, 62-73.

² The matter is compounded by the fact that the *Sho'ubiyah* movement has been subject to misrepresentation as an anti-Arab movement and primarily confined to the infamous and satirical jabs Iranian and Arab poets leveled at one another for the social customs of their ancestors. The one example with which we are familiar is the one which claims that "Arabs are lizard eaters" and thus of low culture and Iranians, as descendants of "khosrows," are preservers of high culture. Refer to Azarnush, 152-162 for examples of this and other lampoons.

³ As its name implies, the work is a (loose) translation of Tabari's *Jāme' al-bayān fi tafsir al-Koran*, though it is more akin to an adaptation than a translation. Critical edition: *Tarjoma-ye tafsir-e Tabari: qessa-hā: Fārsi-e qarn-e chahārom-e Hejri*, ed. Ja'far Modarres Sādeqi, Tehran, 1993.

⁴ Critical edition: Bal'ami, *Tārikh-e Bal'ami*, ed. Mohammad Taqi Bahār, Tehran, 2003. I agree with and would like to reiterate here Andrew Peacock's statement that there is little to suggest that Bal'ami was writing to revitalize Iranian nationalism (Peacock, 107). The term is an anachronism in and of itself and the sentiment it evokes is antithetical to the purpose of intertwining Iranian history with Islamic history as the narratives in Bal'ami's and Tabari's texts suggest.

⁵ Critical edition: Tabari, *Tā'rikh al-rosol wa'l-muluk*, eds. J. Barth, Th. Nöldeke et al., Leiden, 1879.

⁶ There are other histories, pertinent to the discussion at hand, which were not included here because of considerations of time and space. However, they appear in a book project (based on the present author's dissertation) with the tentative title, "Prophets, Kings, and Heroes: Iranian Historiography and the Development of Persian Epics." The book project addresses several of the issues raised in this paper (see notes 7, 8, 15, 16, 19, 21 and 31) and includes other texts. One

claim that the Judeo-Christian progenitor of the human race, Ādam, is one and the same as the first mortal man according to the Avestan tradition, Kayomars. It is important to note here that Kayomars' role expands and evolves in later Iranian *mythos* (as do the roles of the rulers of the Avestan tradition), so that he becomes not only the first king but also the first *just* king of the world.⁷ The texts also expend considerable energy intertwining the narratives of the Koranic prophets with those of the Iranian kings in such a way that the first Iranian mytho-historical kings become contemporaneous with the first prophets, and many of them as followers of these prophets. Considering this, then, two pertinent questions come to mind: First, how does one interpret the intermingling of the narratives and even genealogies of the earliest Iranian mytho-historical kings and the Koranic prophets? Second, how and with what possible aim were these narratives accepted for inclusion in the production of Islamic history?

To answer these questions, the present paper first explores the poetics of several narratives of the first mytho-historical Iranian kings as they appear in the aforementioned texts. In conjunction, the paper analyzes the ways in which these men are represented in the *Avesta* as paradigmatic rulers, and how their essential function as good rulers is retained in the later *mythos* and, hence, texts so that they are equatable to the prophets. These types of analyses will show how the discourse on rulership evolved over time and how, on the one hand, came to inform Islamic ideals of kingship⁸ and, on the other, was adapted to reflect the concerns for equality among the *Sho'ubis*.⁹

such text is Dinavari's (C.E. 828-889) *al-Akhhbār al-tewāl* which focuses on the genealogies of the prophets as well as the genealogies of the Iranian mytho-historical kings beginning with Jamshid (who is typically the fourth king but in this text is also the cousin of Nuh's (Noah) sons). See also Pourshariati 2010, 201-289 for more information on the structure of the *al-Akhhbār al-tewāl* within the context of the *Sho'ubiya* movement.

⁷ The importance of just kingship in connection with the advancement of civilization where kings are beholden to the people in the later Iranian *mythos* is of singular importance for both the development of later Islamic ideals of kingship and the concept of the king as hero in Persian epics (Dabiri 2007). This is expanded upon in the book project.

⁸ The issue of the circular process whereby the Iranian ideals of kingship inform the Islamic ideals and simultaneously the Iranian kings undergo Islamicisation is treated in some detail below in the section dealing with Bal'ami's *Tārikhnāma*. A more in-depth analysis of this process appears in the author's book project. For more on this process in the later mirror-for-princes genre, see Tor 2011. It may also be useful to the reader to refer to (Marlow, 106-110) for the relationship between prophets and kings within the later mirror-for-princes genre.

⁹ In her article, "The Long Shadow of Pre-Islamic Iranian Rulership: Antagonism or Assimilation?," Deborah Tor argues that the inclusion of Iranian kingly ideals "after the ideological failure of the caliphate was not anti-Islamic, as has sometimes been posited, but that, on the contrary, this tradition was suitably modified and adapted in order to assimilate it harmoniously into Islamic culture and political life." (146).

Our inquiry will begin with a brief discussion of the anonymous *Tarjoma-ye tafsir-e Tabari*, since in certain respects, it provides the underpinnings for the arguments made throughout the paper regarding the narratives of the prophets and kings and to the discursive nature of the aforementioned texts. It is well known that despite its title, which unequivocally states that it is actually a translation of Tabari's monumental exegesis, *Jāme' al-bayān fi tafsir al-Koran* (henceforth *Tafsir*), the text is, in its execution, an adaption (Meisami, chapter 1). Among other matters, the *Tarjoma* 1) deals with Tabari's exegesis of the lives of the prophets from Ādam to Muhammad in a condensed form and 2) includes two narratives which do not appear in Tabari's *Tafsir* in its extant form, but which are quite pertinent to the discussion at hand.

The first narrative is the well-known Jamshid-Zahhāk-Feraydun narrative¹⁰ which, on one level, serves as a didactic tale illustrating the precarious relationship that exists between civilization and kingship; When Jamshid, the pre-eminent mytho-historical Iranian king, commits a sin, he loses his kingship and Zahhāk, the tyrannous and murderous snake king, fills the power vacuum until Feraydun, a descendent of Jamshid, comes of age and takes the throne back and restores order to the world. The second narrative is the introduction to the *Tarjoma* wherein the anonymous author informs us of the history of the translation project.

In the introduction, the anonymous author states that in order to be sure that it was lawful to translate the *Tafsir* (since exegetical works of the Koran were enrobed in the same sanctity as the Koran itself) the patron, Samanid ruler Mansur Ebn Nuh (d. 961 CE),¹¹ requested a *fatwā* on the matter (Sādeqi 1993, 1). The translation project was declared permissible, we are told, because those who issued the *fatwā* "knew that the language of the prophets and kings from the time of Ādam to Esmā'il was Persian. Esmā'il was the first to speak Arabic. Our prophet came from Arabia and [They] sent the Koran to him in the language of the Arabs"¹² (Ibid.).

The first part of this declarative sentence—the notion that the language of the prophets and kings from Ādam to Esmā'il was Persian—presupposes the idea that Ādam is none other than the Persian, hence *Persian speaking*,

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this, in conjunction with other texts, see below.

¹¹ The Samanid court in Bukhara was a prominent center of scholarly production. The Samanids patronized such illustrious figures as Ebn Sinā, Abu Rayhān Bīrūnī, and Rudakī as well as poets such as Daqiqī, Abu Shakur Balkhī, and Shāker Bokhārī among others and commissioned the translations of Tabari's *Jāme' al-bayān fi tafsir al-Koran* and *Tā'rikh al-rosol wa'l-muluk*, into New Persian.

¹² The sentence reads:

و پیغمبر ما از عرب بیرون آمد و این ((قرآن)) به زبان عرب بر او فرستادند

Kayomars whose name is derived from the Avestan *Gaiia Marətam* which means “speaking mortal” and of which Bal’ami’s text is aware (Bal’ami, 8-9). In the second part, the author makes yet another important point which may be interpreted within a sociolinguistic frame: though Persian was the language of the prophets for generations, the Prophet Muhammad did not know this language, as territorially, he “came from Arabia.”¹³ Within context, and intertextually therefore, the *Tarjoma*’s statement that Persian was the language spoken by the earlier prophets lays the necessary foundation for including the Jamshid-Zahhāk-Feraydun narrative within the same conceptual/religious framework as the Koranic prophets, who are the descendants of Ādam who is, according to other popular histories in circulation at the time, also Kayomars. By claiming that the prophets beginning with Ādam spoke Persian, the author implicitly presupposes the “Ādam is Kayomars” paradigm. This implicit reference speaks primarily to the intertextuality and discursive nature of this and other texts especially when we consider the fact that, as is well established, the *Tarjoma* and *Tārikhnāma* shared not only the same patron, Mansur Ebn Nuh (d. 961), but also the same overall agenda (Meisami, chapter 1) and narrative structure in the context of the prophets and kings. Moreover, in sandwiching the Jamshid-Zahhāk-Feraydun storyline in between the narratives of Saleh and Ebrahim, the *Tarjoma-ye tafsir*, implicitly references Bal’ami’s *Tārikhnāma*, Tabari’s *Tā’rikh*, and Dinavari’s *al-Akhhbār al-tewāl* which, to varying extents, intertwine the narratives of the prophets and kings, include narratives that make the ancient prophets and kings relatives and/or descendants of one another, and partake of the same discourse on the nature of kingship. Since these are the only two narratives in the *Tarjoma-ye tafsir* that are immediately relevant to the topic at hand, we will now turn to its sibling text, Bal’ami’s

¹³ We may take it for granted that the scholars, who were gathered from Transoxiana to deliberate and deliver a *fatwā* concerning the legality of translating the Tafsir, were familiar with Jāhez’s works. When we do so, then the reasoning behind the *fatwā* can be read as a response to Jāhez’s claim that languages have affinitive and repulsive characteristics and translators commit harm “when they are not competent in both languages” and as such “each of the two languages attracts the other, takes from it, and hinders it” (Jāhez, 75). Accordingly, Persian and Arabic are equal to one another as they are both prophetic languages. Therefore, the problems associated with translating, as Jāhez describes them, are immaterial especially in consideration of translating an exegesis of the Koran. One may infer that according to the author of the introduction a translator can not commit such harms as both Persian and Arabic are prophetic languages and, thus, have a greater affinity to one another at least at the prelingual or prophetic level. Of particular significance also is the anonymous author of the introduction leaves the regional provenance of Ādam to Esmā’il quite unclear, as we are informed that it was only Esmā’il who was “the first to speak Arabic.”

Tārikhnāma,¹⁴ and the text upon which it is based, Tabari's *Tā'rikh*, for a more in depth look at the ways in which equality was narrated and Iranian history included in the production of Islamic history.¹⁵

Tabari's monolithic *Tā'rikh* is often labeled as a universal history for its representation of the history of the world from creation to the author's own time. After the section on cosmogony, however, the *Tā'rikh's* concern for the universal slowly progresses toward the particular—the Muslim community—as though history were a teleological march toward the formation of that community. On another level, and as the title implies, the *Tā'rikh* underscores the often tense relationship between kings and the prophets, who are reported as being the genealogical predecessors of the Muslim community and represent “types of moral life” (Khalidi, 9). While exploring the relationships between the ancient prophets and kings, the often seemingly disparate narratives in fact work in concert to connect these two themes and to construct an overarching parable on kingship and its relationship to society's wellbeing.¹⁶

As previously mentioned, the *Tā'rikh* expends time, space, and energy on the intertwined narratives of the ancient prophets and Iranian mytho-historical kings and, significantly, equates several of the Koranic prophets with the Iranian mytho-historical kings. It is when we look closely at the narratives of the first prophets and kings that we find Tabari's three interlinked roles—chronologist, compiler, and commentator¹⁷—to be working in concert to connect the early Koranic prophets and Iranian mytho-historical kings in various ways. First, in his role as a compiler, Tabari intertwines the narratives of the prophets and kings. Before Ādam's story is completed, for instance, the *Tā'rikh* offers reports that equate Kayomars to Ādam (Tabari I, 154). The *Tā'rikh* then returns to Ādam and his son, Shis (Seth). Next, Tabari reports on Hawwā's (Eve) death and on her burial site, before ending with reports on Ādam's death and the location of where he is buried. Before addressing the *just* rule of

¹⁴ As mentioned above, both the *Tarjoma-ye tafsir* and Bal'ami's *Tārikhnāma* share the same patron and similar types of translation methodologies (Dabiri 2007, chapter 3) which are too similar to be coincidental. For more on the translation methodology of the *Tārikhnāma* refer to (Peacock, 73–136).

¹⁵ There are, to be sure, many other passages in both texts that elucidate the relationship between these texts and the discourse on kingship and is treated in the book project (see note 16).

¹⁶ These concepts as part of a king's *just* rule, are expanded upon in greater detail and in relation to the Avesta, several Middle Persian texts and Islamic universal histories, and Persian epics in the aforementioned book project. Though arrived at independently of one another, Whitby (whose article I came across during the final edit of this paper) also has had occasion to note briefly the connection between *just* rule and prosperity in Tabari's *Tā'rikh* (24).

¹⁷ Though concerned with medieval European literature, Alistair Minnis' *Medieval Theory of Authorship* provides invaluable insight into these roles (see chapter 1 in particular). See Whitby for the importance of “Persian royal chronology” in Tabari's *Tā'rikh* (21).

Hushang (typically counted as the second Iranian mytho-historical king), the *Tā'rikh* explicitly deals with the sins that were introduced in Ādam's time and increased throughout the generations, especially among the descendants of Qābil (Cain), who ruled on earth until they were drowned in Nuh's (Noah) time (Tabari I, 170). Then, after a few narratives on other descendants of Ādam, the text continues the intertwined narratives of several prophets and kings, including those of Jamshid and Zāhhāk, completely interweaving these stories with Nuh's story.

While at first glance these intertwined narratives seem oddly juxtaposed,¹⁸ however, there is a clear logic at work here, one that is connected to the notion of the prophets as "moral types" as equivalent to the kings as "heroic types" (to which I will have occasion to return further on). For the time being, it should be noted that the considerable attention the reports give to *when* the Iranian mythical kings ruled makes it clear that chronological issues are of primary concern.

As a commentator, on the other hand, Tabari removes himself from several of these narratives regarding the "Ādam is Kayomars" paradigm and casts doubt on them by stating "but God knows best" (Tabari I, 154), thereby absolving himself of any possible suspicion for including them. In one marked instance, nevertheless, he interrupts the narrative of his own source to weigh in on an "erroneous" claim regarding the Persians:

Thus Heshām al-Kalbi told me that, "it has come down to us, but God knows best, that the first king, king of the Earth, [was] Ushahanq ebn 'Āber ebn Shālekh ebn Arfakhshad ebn Sām ebn Nuh." He said, "The Persians claim him and maintain that he came two hundred years after the death of Ādam." He said, "Rather it has come down to us that this king came two hundred years after Nuh. The Persians imagine that he [came] two hundred years after Ādam thus they do not know what was before Nuh." That which Heshām said is baseless, since among those knowledgeable about genealogies about the Fors, King Hushahank, is more famous than al-Hajjāj ebn Yusef is among the Muslims. *Every nation is more knowledgeable of its ancestors and its events and its genealogies than any other people.* So in regard to any confusion on the matter one should go to those who know. Some Persian genealogists maintain that Ushahanj Bishdād, the king, is Mehlā'el and his father Fravāk is Qinān father of Mehlā'el and Siyāmak is Anush, the father of Qinān, and Mashā is Shis, the father of Anush and that Jayomart is Ādam, peace be upon him. Thus, if it were as he says, then there can be no doubt that Ushahanj lived in the time of Ādam"¹⁹ (Tabari I, 154-155).

¹⁸ This is, of course, taking into consideration the difficulties in ascertaining how much of the text has been susceptible to the vicissitudes of time, copyist and scribal errors, additions, and omissions and other issues connected with manuscript production.

¹⁹ Emphasis mine.

Here, Tabari first includes Kalbi's report which includes the phrase, "but God knows best," and then refutes it a few lines later to weigh in heavily on the side of Persian genealogists by maintaining the veracity of their knowledge regarding their own lineages. He advises, further, that if there is doubt, one should turn to those who know; i.e. the Persian genealogists who maintain that Hushang (Ar. Ushahanj) is a descendant of Ādam who is Kayomars (Ar. Jayomart). As was suggested earlier, narratives such as the one above, supported and legitimized the notion that the Arabs and Iranians, as coreligionists in Islam, shared the same religious ancestry and were thus coequals, as in the "Ushahanj is Mehlā'el" and "Jayomart is Ādam" paradigms.

This concern of Iranian-Muslims for equality, is dealt with at length by Roy Mottahedeh in his seminal article, "The Shu'ūbiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran." The main focus of Mottahedeh's article, however, is the Koranic commentaries since, as he states, they "provide a copious and almost untouched source of information for the opinions of Muslims in every age on social and political ideas." (Mottahedeh, 163) Through these commentaries, Mottahedeh dissects the term *shu'ūb*, first delineating its origins from Koran 13:49 "which reads 'Oh men, We have created you from a male and a female, and We have made you into groups (*shu'ūb*) and tribes (*qabā'il*) that you may come to know one another; truly the noblest (*akram*) among you is most righteous (*atqā*) among you'" (164). He further elucidates that the last part of this verse "*was used to combat the tribal pride that was such a danger to the Islamic community...* [and that t]he *shu'ūbīs* were often called the *ahl at-taswiyah* 'people who advocate equality' and sometimes used the Qur'ānic phrase 'Truly the noblest among you before God is the most righteous' as the cornerstone of their argument"²⁰ (Ibid.).

In the texts under discussion, however, the narratives that equate the Iranian first men/kings to the ancient prophets not only reformulated Iranian history as part of the Judeo-Islamic tradition, but were also conceived, arguably, as a bid to establish that the Iranians had a noble and ancient lineage on par with the Arabs as Muslims, since the first Iranian man, Kayomars, is made to be one and the same as Ādam, who is also made to be Muhammad's (prophetic) forefather²¹ (though the much more popular and later claim is that

²⁰ Emphasis mine. It is not my intention here to claim that Tabari took part in this literary controversy, but it is arguable that the text may have played a formative role in the structuring of those arguments, and at the very least, reflects the concerns of the movement.

²¹ Ebn Eshāq's *Sirat nasul Allāh*, which is preserved in part in the work, *Sirat al-nabawiya*, of his pupil Ebn Heshām, is the first extant Islamic universal history that arguably was written to provide the Muslim community with a history to compete with the histories of the Jews, Christians, and Iranians (Selheim). As such, it provides such a genealogy for the prophet Muhammad

the Arab-Muslims in general are descendants of the later prophet Esmā'il). Therefore, this ancient lineage establishes a firm base from which the Iranians could claim to be equally noble and as righteous as the Arabs (who possessed a strong sense of nobility through genealogy, first by way of tribal lineage, and later as collective Muslims, by descent from Esmā'il and Muhammad as a descendent of Ādam). These narratives also provided the logic needed to include the Iranians, and their strong historiographical tradition,²² though now *as Muslims* in the production of Islamic history, as opposed to a population who had been represented primarily as the subject of conquest narratives.

And what of these first men-kings and the prophets themselves? Other than the concern on the part of the Iranians to establish equality with the Arab-Muslims as coreligionists, what is the basis by which the original transmitters of the reports—the often anonymous and unnamed Persian genealogists, *ahl al-Fors*, or the *dehqāns*,²³ make such claims regarding the prophets and kings? How and with what aim were these narratives accepted for inclusion in the production of Islamic history? One way of answering this question is to look at the function of the prophets, who, as “moral types,” are relatable/related to the kings, who, as heroic types, are

expected to maintain and embody the law in the sense of cosmic, natural and human order, partly by acting as the symbolic head of the community and partly by observing the right ways and setting a good example. If [they] did so, happiness would ensue. (Crone, 47)

The first Iranian mytho-historical kings (known as the *Pishdādiyān*)²⁴ are heroic types and appear as such in later texts such as the aforementioned histories and the historical-heroic epic, the *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings), since they perform three essential functions as kings: they vow before God and promise their subjects to reign justly, they deliver on that promise and, most importantly, they advance civilization for the benefit of humanity.

(Ebn Hisham, 1). The relationship between Ebn Eshāq's *Sirat rasul Allāh* and Tabari's *Ta'rikh* is explored further in the aforementioned book project.

²² For more detailed explanations refer to Shahbazi, 208-29; Pourshariati 2008, chapter 1; Canepa, 39-52.

²³ The *dehqāns* were the landed gentry who, as legend would have it, were the self-appointed heirs and guardians of Iranian culture, literature, and history.

²⁴ An erroneous etymology for this word was developed in the ninth and tenth centuries and circulated by a few historians of the time to mean the first to rule justly. For instance, based on his source, Tabari, Sa'ālebi, in his *Ghorar al-muluk*, takes the suffix *datas* for the word *dād* which in Middle and New Persian means “justice” or “law” and is also the past participle “gave” in New Persian (Sa'ālebi, 5). However, the term is actually derived from Hushang's Avestan epithet Paraδatas which means “created before” (Hintze, 47).

Now, these first kings and their deeds have their origins in the *Avesta*, the sacred texts of the Zoroastrian religious tradition.²⁵ Much of the *Avesta* is liturgical and ritualistic in nature and enables the singer to perceive, through recitation, the underlying relationship between themselves, the reciters/supplicants before them, the deities that have been entreated by these supplicants, and finally the kinds of favors that are acceptable to the deities. As the earliest extant work that features the first men-rulers, the *Avesta* provides invaluable insight into the essence of their roles and of their functions at an early (if not their earliest) stage. Not surprisingly, therefore, the *Avesta* often sees the first men-rulers in passages where they (and others) pay homage to various earthly and ethereal entities which invariably links together their dual roles as good rulers as well as proper supplicants. Put differently, the men's main function as good rulers, and destroyers of Iran's human and demonic enemies, appears to be the reason for and end result of their supplication to the various power-granting deities to begin with.

According to the *Avesta*, these rulers are "good shepherds" (Darmester, 252-253). They supplicate to various power-granting deities who, in return for being honored with the right number and kinds of sacrifices—a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, and ten thousand lambs—and for the right reasons, i.e. the benefit of humanity and/or the destruction of Iran's human and non-human enemies, grant these men the authority to rule the world (Ibid., 58-59). Some of these rulers are annihilators of Iran's human and demonic enemies, while others are bludgeon-bearers who smite civilization-destroying dragons. (Ibid., 53-57) The most preeminent of them, Yima (New Persian Jamshid), whose epithet, *xšātaḥ*,²⁶ means shining, is radiant and golden and during his reign people never suffer hunger, cold, or death. The ones featured regularly—Yima, Thrætona, and Keresaspa—are themselves the rewards granted to their fathers for being the first to press the sacred plant, *haoma*, into a life-giving, milky, elixir. Most importantly, they all bear the glory, *xʷarənah*,²⁷ the preeminent sign of the men's good rule which was bestowed by Ahura Mazdā "the

²⁵ Textual analysis has shown that the canon texts were not all written in the same period and that there exists a "chronological distinction between the Old Avestan texts—the Gāthās which consists of Yasnas (liturgical texts) 28-34, 43-51, and 53; the Yasna Haptahāiti Yasnas 35-41; and the four great prayers of Yasna 27—and the remaining, Young Avestan, texts." (Kellens 2011). For more information on the Avestan texts, see the following critical studies: Humbach 1994; Humbach and Ichaporia 1998; Kellens 1979; and Kellens and Pirart 1988.

²⁶ The combination of his name and epithet give the Middle (and New) Persian version of his name Jamshid.

²⁷ Unsurprisingly, the Arabic texts make no mention of either the supplications or the *xʷarənah* and while the New Persian texts do mention the *farr* (New Persian for *xʷarənah*), the supplication to the deities are left out. Even if we leave room for the possibility that those recensions were not

one uncreated God²⁸ (Y. 30.3, 45.2), wholly wise, benevolent and good, Creator and upholder of (truth) *aša* (Y. 31.8)” (Boyce).

In *Yasna* (liturgical text) 48:5 of the *Gāthās*, a reciter implores, “Let good rulers assume rule, do not let bad rulers assume rule over us” (Humbach, 177). This concern for good rule echoes throughout the Old and Young Avestan texts, and is primarily treated in several *Yāsts* (hymns) particularly the *Ābān* (waters) *Yāst* to the water deity, Anāhitā, and *Rām* (joy) *Yāst*.

In these *Yāsts*, the first men-rulers supplicate the deities for world dominion. The most prominent of these first men-rulers is Yima who supplicates the water deity Anāhitā:

To her did Yima Khshaeta, the good shepherd, offer up a sacrifice from the height Hukairya, with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs. He begged of her a boon, saying: “Grant me this, O good, most beneficent Ardvī Sūrā Anāhitā! that I may become the sovereign lord of all countries, of the Daēvas and men, of the Yātus and Pairikas, of the oppressors, the blind and the deaf; and that I may take from the Daēvas both riches and welfare, both fatness and flocks, both weal and Glory.” Ardvī Sūrā Anāhitā granted him that boon, as he was offering libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, and entreating that she would grant him that boon. (Darmesteter, 58-59)

and in a subsequent hymn, the *Rām Yāst*, Yima supplicates to the deity Vayu:

Unto him did the bright Yima, the good shepherd, sacrifice from the height Hukairya, the all-shining and golden, on a golden throne, under golden beams and a golden canopy, with bundles of baresma and offerings of full-boiling [milk]. He begged of him a boon, saying: “Grant me this, O Vayu! who dost work highly, that I may become the most glorious of the men born to behold the sun: that I may make in my reign both animals and men undying, waters and plants undrying, and the food for eating creatures never-failing.” In the reign of the valiant Yima there was neither cold wind nor hot wind, neither old age nor death, nor envy made by the Daēvas. Vayu, who works highly, granted him that boon, as the Maker Ahura Mazda, did pursue it. (Darmesteter, 252-253)

The entreaty in *Yasna* 48:5 is made all the more poignant by the preceding verses in *Yasna* 32:8-10, where the reciter harshly condemns Yima:

available to the later writers, the likelier possibility is that they were omitted, as inclusion of them would have been problematic, on many different levels, for the Muslim authors.

²⁸ By the late Sasanian era, Ahriman and Ohrmazd’s rivaling and near equal existence is often cited for the dualistic aspects of Zoroastrianism. In the Avestan texts, Angra Mainyu (evil spirit) is the more often mentioned oppositional force to Ahura Mazda.

Even Yima, the son of Vivahvan, became notorious for (one instance of) such crimes... in swearing by God (Humbach, 133) [which Humbach refers to as] swearing (falsely) by God (*bagā xʷarəmnō*) (Ibid., 18). The blasphemer spoils one's reputation. With (his) pronouncements, (he spoils) the intellect of the living. He robs people of the command (which is) esteemed by good thought... Those indeed spoil life, (those) deceitful who boast about their (so-called) great (activities) (Ibid., 134).

From other passages in which the deities grant the desires of the other rulers to rid the world of demons,²⁹ it may be inferred that during the reigns preceding that of Yima, the people also enjoyed such protections. It is under Yima's reign, however, that the people enjoy the greatest tranquility and immortality until Yima commits his first sin. For his sin, the *xʷarənah* (divine glory rendered in New Persian as *farr*),³⁰ flees from Yima at which point several non-Iranian and non-human entities seek it out in order to rule the world (Hintze, 22). One of the two most prominent claimants to rulership is the three-mouthed serpent, Aži Dahāka (New Persian Zāhhāk), who makes the same supplication that Yima, and the rulers before him, make to the same deities:

To her [Anāhītā] did Azi Dahēka, the three-mouthed, offer up a sacrifice in the land of Bawri, with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, and ten thousand lambs. He begged of her a boon, saying: "Grant me this boon, O good, most beneficent Ardvi Sūra Anāhītā! that I may make all the seven Karshvares of the earth empty of men." Ardvi Sūra Anāhītā did not grant him that boon, although he was offering libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, and entreating her that she would grant him that boon (Darmesteter, 60-61).

Aži Dahāka, who is not, as it may be inferred, a "good shepherd," is denied his request. Both Yima and Aži Dahāka offer Anāhītā and Vayu the same sacrifices, "a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs." The libations and other offerings, however, are insufficient in the granting of boons. The sacrifices alone do not satisfy the deities. It is, significantly, the person, his ascribed traits and, more importantly, the favor being asked that determine whether or not a "boon" will be granted. Yima, at the time of supplication, is described as a "good shepherd," which means he has either not yet lost his *xʷarənah* or has regained it (having lost it a total of three times). He asks to have dominion over all the countries, but this seemingly self-satisfying desire is qualified by the goal of utilizing this power and subsequent authority,

²⁹ See Haošiianjha's supplication right before Yima's in Darmesteter (251-252).

³⁰ According to the later *Hōm* (earth) *Yāšt*, he sins a total of three times (the sins are never fully explained) and loses the *xʷarənah* three times, though only *Yasna* 32: 8-10 mentions the one sin almost explicitly.

in order to undermine the power of the demons, bring immortality to humanity and eradicate envy. Having his wish granted, he becomes the ruler of all countries, a “good shepherd” of the people.

A significant aspect of the Avestan passages that deal with the prayers of the men for world dominion is that Aži Dahāka is usually placed in between Yima and Thrīta/Thrætōna. On one level, his placement contrasts with the righteous requests of Yima and the preceding and subsequent worthy supplicants, which illustrates that one must offer not only libations in order to secure a favor or a blessing, but also that the favor or the blessing sought must be of benefit to humanity. Aži Dahāka’s request to make the “seven countries empty of men” is antithetical to the Zoroastrian doctrine which views all of Ahura Mazda’s creations as important in the cosmic battle against evil. His request, therefore, is not granted by the deities.

As noted above, the function of the first men-rulers remains nearly intact in the Arabic and New Persian histories, though they evolved over time from the hymns and liturgical texts of the *Avesta* to detailed parabolic *mythoi* contained in the ninth and tenth century histories. For instance, one of the main themes of the *Ta’rikh* is on the nature of kings:

[those who were] disobedient to God and those [who were] obedient to God... Now we will report [the story of] the first who received dominion and His blessings and [later] was ungrateful, disavowed God, and was insolent toward his God and displayed arrogance (Tabari I, 78).

Starting with the premise that Kayomars is Ādam, the *Ta’rikh* thus reports on the good deeds of the Iranian-mytho-historical kings and how each was blessed by God until Jamshid (Av. Yima/Ar. Jamm al-Shid) commits his first of three sins. Here it should be recalled that Yima’s sin in the *Gāthās* was “swearing falsely by God” for which one of the consequences was that “(his) pronouncements spoil life” (Humbach, 134). Before his sin, Yima xšāeta was “watching over his subjects, born most brilliant man, shining to look at who in this world with his kingly authority made animals and men immortal. In the reign of illustrious Yima, there was neither severe cold nor heat, nor enhanced old age, nor death nor evil created envy” (Sethna, 35). Likewise, in the *Ta’rikh* it is reported that: “the Persian scholars maintain that the king after Tahmuras is Jamm al-Shid. al-Shid means [he] who possesses radiant beams and they named him that for what they claim about his beauty” (Tabari I, 179). And “Jamm al-Shid possessed God’s blessing. He gathered the people and the *jinn* and informed them that he was their leader and their master and that by his power, he was their protector against illness, senility, and death” (Tabari I, 181). Then he “disavowed the Grace of God, may He be honored and glorified,

and he prolonged in that transgression and he lost his place and magnificence" (Ibid.). The *Tārikh* then reports two different *mythoi* that give the reason for Jamshid's transgression, each of which is an elaboration of the statement rendered in *Yasna* 32:8-10, "[the] deceitful who boast about their (so-called) great (activities)." The first *mythos* is a report by Wahb ebn Munnabeh, which Bal'ami adopted, and the other is a report by Heshām al-Kalbi, which reflects the older Iranian *mythos* and is preserved by Ferdowsi in his *Shāhnāma*³¹ (Dabiri 2010, 20-28).

Bal'ami's treatment of Jamshid's fall from grace and Zakhāk's rise to power is reformulated to fit into the Perso-Islamic ideal of just kingship. In Bal'ami's *Tārikhnāma*, the role of the viziers takes on a new importance when it offers the following as cause for celebrating *Nawruz* (the Iranian New Year): Having accomplished so much to advance civilization, Jamshid turns to his viziers for advice on what else remains to be done to benefit humanity. Significantly, his viziers advise him that he should establish the *mazālim* tribunals (boards of grievances).³² He agrees and, after setting up this new court, the people celebrate and call this auspicious day, *Nawruz* (lit. new day). Soon after, however, Eblis (Satan) finds Jamshid sitting *alone without his viziers*. He suddenly materializes before Jamshid. Startled, Jamshid asks the strange being to identify himself, at which point Eblis claims that he is an angel come from Heaven to remind him that:

If you had been one of Ādam's children, you too would have become sick and died. You are the God of the Earth and the Heavens and you do not recognize yourself. You were in Heaven and you created this world. In Heaven you set aright

³¹ In the epics, whose main protagonists are kings, beginning with the *Shāhnāma*, the first kings, until Jamshid, are good rulers who are depicted as heroes of their own reigns and perform the "heroic" role of defending Iranian kingship. In the Iranian tradition, this role is first taken up by Feraydun, a descendant of Jamshid, who defeats Zakhāk and restores order and a just society, and later on by the hero par excellence, Rostam, when the kings are no longer able to take on the dual function of king-warrior or more aptly king-demon tamer/slayer, as demonstrated by Kay Kāvus' many ill-advised adventures. The first kings, therefore, are heroes because, like their Avestan counterparts, they fulfill their roles as good rulers. This is also treated at length in the book project.

³² While the significance of this addition to the narrative cannot be lost on the reader as Bal'ami was himself a prominent vizier and the son of a vizier, I have argued elsewhere (Dabiri 2007, chapter 3) that the notion of a king seeking advice on justice from his viziers is one way in which the Iranian ideals of kingship was Islamicised as it reflects the growing influence of the vizier in matters of governance and administration. It also reflects how the "*mazālim* tribunals (lit. boards of grievances), generally instated by the governors and vizier, theoretically on behalf of the caliph, and presumably for the purpose of correcting wrongs committed by state officials" (Hallaq, 99) was seen as a way in which the king was beholden to the people in the realm of law in addition to progress and wellbeing.

the operations and then you came to Earth to set in order its system and bring justice. [You were to] then return to Heaven, but now you have forgotten yourself. I am one of your Angels and you have a lot of prerogatives over me. I have come to make you aware... You brought justice to these people. Command them to worship you and whoever obeys, reward them and whoever disobeys, burn them (Bal'ami, 89).

As it has been observed a propos the Islamic doctrine, "[i]t is a peculiarly Satanic activity to seduce man from the recollection of God into spiritual blindness and oblivion, as if the cosmic struggle between good and evil is fought over man's memory"³³ (Khalidi, 12). Bal'ami's *Tārikhnāma*, thus, holds the devil culpable for Jamshid's epistemological confusion. Jamshid forgets the knowledge that he and his viziers, *together*, had established a court of justice for the benefit of humanity and he forgets that he is obedient to God and beholden by his promises to the people. He forgets all this and believes the devil's insinuation that *he is* in fact God. As mentioned above, this is a reflection of the sin that Yima commits in *Yasna* 32:8-10, namely, that "[the] deceitful who boast about their (so-called) great (activities)," and in the *Gāthās*, where he is depicted as "swearing falsely by God." Jamshid's fall has consequences that reverberate throughout Iranian/Perso-Islamic mytho-history. Zahhāk usurps the kingship and (by feeding the brains of every able-bodied young man in the world to the two snakes on his shoulders), nearly accomplishes what his Avestan counterpart, Aži Dahāka, was unable to begin (i.e. ridding the world of humanity).

In the above-mentioned narratives, the mytho-historical kings provide a moral example that other rulers should follow. Their stories are didactic tales—lessons to be drawn from those kings who either obey or disobey God, or in disobeying God, do not heed the warnings of prophets. The first Iranian kings are obedient to God, rule justly or institute a court of justice, and promise their subjects that they will care for their wellbeing. All of the first kings deliver on their promises to God and the people until Jamshid who, much like Fer'awn—the king most diametrically opposed to the prophets and the one who states: "Council, I know of no other God of yours but me (Koran 28: 38)" (Khalidi, 11)—forgets that it is through the beneficence of God that he and his people live eternally and without hardship. The lesson, here, is not only that Jamshid loses the divine aura and his kingship, but also that, upon

³³ In Ghazālī's *On Disciplining the Soul*, in response to Moses who asks, "what is it then... that a man does which enables you to prevail over him?" Eblis states that "[h]e becomes pleased with himself, and considers that he has many good deeds to his credit, and forgets his sins" (166).

losing it, society falls apart, the kingship is weakened, and the people suffer as a result. Jamshid is killed and the kingship is usurped by the tyrannical Zāhhāk, who, much like his Avestan counterpart, attempts to rid the world of men. As Tabari makes clear, the damage sustained is immense: "According to Habib ebn Aws, no harm was done by Fer'awn . . . like that which Zāhhāk committed in his attack against the world" (Tabari I, 201). By the same token, as the narrative ends on Nuh's reign and right before he begins Zāhhāk's story, Bal'ami's *Tārikhnāma* informs us that "the eighty people [who boarded Nuh's ark and survived the flood] died and no[t one of their] descendants survived except those of Nuh's sons: Sām, Hām, and Yāfes. From Sām descended the Arabs and the Persians, the white races, the Romans, the prophets, and good men. From Hām descended the black races, the infidels, Fer'awns, kings, [and] oppressors . . . and a thousand years after the flood, arose a king, a descendant of Hām ebn Nuh. His name was Zāhhāk and he was a sorcerer"³⁴ (Bal'ami, 97). Tabari's and Bal'ami's texts do not hesitate to offer reports that either compare the worst of Iranian kings with the worst of Koranic kings/tyrants just as they barely hesitate to present reports which equate the best Iranian kings to the Koranic prophets, intertwine their narratives or claim that the worst of Iranian kings are descendants of a prophet's sinning son. Whichever way the coin is tossed, the narratives described above illustrate how Iranian mytho-history and Iranian kingly ideals were adopted into an Islamic framework and established a new historical presence and pertinence for the Iranians as Muslims.

Umberto Eco writes "that not infrequently, books speak of books, it is as if they spoke among themselves... an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers"³⁵ (Ecco, 286). As a dialogue that speaks to the equality of languages and the status of various peoples living in a fluid and dynamic society, the narratives such as the ones analysed above establish the equality of the Persians and Arabs as coreligionists which thereby, counterclaim the Arab-Muslims' assertions of privilege and status, in terms of religious genealogy (where Ādam is the prophetic forefather of Muhammad) and language (as Arabic became enrobed in the same sanctity as the Koran). However, further analyses of these and other histories, narratives, Koranic exegeses, poems, lampoons and invectives are needed to gain a fuller

³⁴ For a detailed description and interpretation of the problematic sin Nuh's sons commit against him and his curse that divides the world into three races, refer to Klar, 148-161. This division of people into races is somewhat similar to Jamshid's decree to divide people into different classes based on their function in society. For the latter notion, in conjunction with other Indo-European myths, refer to Dumézil's *Mythe et Épopée*.

³⁵ I would like to thank Owen Miller for the citation.

and more comprehensive picture of the social historical context of the Iranian areas of the Islamic empire, and especially of the significance of the *Sho'ubiya* controversy as a literary and, most importantly, as a cultural movement. This investigation becomes especially pertinent when we view the notion of the "cultural as political struggle" (Bhaba, 52); the positing and articulation of a group's socio-cultural concerns especially with respect to their perceived or actual status in society, is a political act. In light of this, we can see, if only a little more clearly, how the *'odaba'* (litterateurs) and *'olama'* (scholars) were able to negotiate their respective concerns and thus manoeuvre in the interstitial spaces between culture and politics. They did so through writing satirical poetry, exegeses, or universal histories. As for the latter, by intertwining the histories of the various peoples living in the same socio-cultural space, they continually reinvented the space for the populations about whom they were writing. More specifically, the narratives described above, illustrate how Iranian mytho-history was adopted into an Islamic framework, thereby establishing for Iranians a new historical presence not only as Muslims, but also as co-equals with the Arab Muslims in religion, and beyond that of merely conquered subjects.

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